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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature, this report concerns itself with the identification of the Mexican American with his ethnic group as an asset or a liability. Examining the relationship of cultural marginality to education, personality, and attitudes, the author points out a need for additional research in this area (i.e., longitudinal studies concerned with how milieu and socioeconomic class relate to the effects of acculturation on personality and education, and studies of family dynamics). Included are 9 references. (MJB)

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EFFECTS OF CULTURAL MARGINALITY ON EDUCATION AND PERSONALITY

By
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Introduction

Studies attempting to relate acculturation to educational attainment and/or personality adjustment in Mexican-Americans invariably concern themselves with one central issue - is identification with the ethnic group an asset or a liability for the Chicano? Information relative to this issue is very critical at present because of the recent emergence of the philosophy of cultural democracy on the American educational scene. Thus, data relative to the effects of acculturation on education and personality will undoubtedly come to determine whether cultural democracy will replace the melting pot as the guiding philosophy of compensatory education and mental health programs designed for Mexican-Americans. Should research results show that maintaining identification with the ethnic group is detremental to the child's educational achievement and his psychological adjustment, then the emergent policy of cultural democracy will be called into question. Conversely, however, if identification with the ethnic group is found to be a necessary ingredient of academic success and a positive self image, then, the policy of cultural relevancy must come to dominate efforts in developing experimental educational and mental health pro-

grams for Chicanos.

Review of the Literature

Studies dealing with the relationship of cultural marginality to education.

The most recent study in this area is one by Schwartz (1969). The subjects in the study were Mexican-American and Anglo-American high school students from schools in the Los Angeles area. The experimenter administered an attitudes inventory to the students. The results indicated that there were substantial differences in some special value orientations between Mexican-American and Anglo-American pupils from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Namely, Chicanos accepted wide-scope family authority, viewed their fellow man with caution and viewed their own destiny with resignation. Schwartz found that orientation to the family was the most obvious of these value differences, i.e., more Chicanos than Anglos indicated a desire for parental guidance and approval. Furthermore, scores based on reading tests showed that achieving Chicanos differed from their achieving Anglo counterparts chiefly in their orientation to authority, that is, in their reluctance to exercise control over others and in their lack of independence from parental authority. However, achieving Mexican-Americans indicated that they were more independent from parental control than non-achieving Mexican-Americans and also that they had greater concern for

peer than adult disapproval. Attempting to explain these findings, the author concludes that by moving away from the strong influence of the family the pupil frees himself of the cultural ties which may inhibit his achievement. Moreover, with independence from family authority, the pupil is emotionally free to change his major reference group and acquire new values and behaviors. The author goes on to state, "one can conclude from this analysis that as opportunities are presented to Mexican-American youth for some acculturation to Anglo values so are opportunities presented for greater educational achievement." Another recent study by Cordova (1969) has obtained findings which are somewhat different from those obtained by Schwartz. Spanish-American sixth grade students from Albuquerque and from school districts in Northern New Mexico were administered a questionnaire. The results obtained show that values and beliefs in the area of politics (importance attributed to taxes, policemen, judges, etc.) and education (importance attributed to attendance, school activities, etc.) were negatively related to a general feeling of alienation and feelings that school activites were not rewarding or valuable, thus, as there is an increase in the acceptance by Spanish-American students of the dominant values and beliefs concerning education and politics there is a decrease in their feelings of alienation. Acculturation with respect to family values was found to be related to feelings of power-

lessness, i.e., the Ss felt that their behaviors could not obtain the goals and reinforcements they sought. Finally, as acculturation in the areas of family and politics increased the achievement of urban middleclass students decreased. From this Cordova concluded "these findings imply that previous assumptions that acculturation is a cure-all for educational problems of Spanish-American students is not accurate."

A study by Henderson & Merritt (1968) throws some additional light on the relationship of acculturation to educational achievement. Two groups of Chicano mothers of six year old children attending schools in Tucson, Arizona were given an interview which attempted to get at nine environmental process variables-achievement press, language models, academic guidance, activeness of family, intellectuality in the home, work habits in the family, identification with models, range of social interaction, and perception of practical values of education. There were two groups of mothers interviewed - one group was composed of mothers of high potential children, identified as such by their scores on the Goodenough Harris Drawing Test and the Van Alstyne Picture Vocabulary Test, and another group was composed of mothers of children who had scored low on these same tests (i.e. low potential group). The results showed that as expected the means on all environmental process variables were higher for the high potential group, thus, indicating that children in the high potential

group were exposed to a wider variety of stimulating experiences. The most interesting finding of the study, however, was that high potential children scored higher than low potential children on a test of Spanish vocabulary. The author concludes, "the data seemed to refute the common assumption that children from families that are the most 'Mexican' in their behavior and outlook will have difficulty in school," the author goes on to say, "it appears that high potential families may participate more fully than families of low potential children in both Anglo-American and Mexican-American cultures."

So far we have examined results of studies in California, New Mexico, and Arizona, to round out the picture let us look into a study performed in Texas. Anderson and Johnson (1968) studied elementary and secondary Chicano school children and their families in El Paso. The Ss were all of the low socio-economic class. Families were interviewed and the students were administered a questionnaire. The following results were obtained: 1. for most of the families Spanish was the primary language, 2. parents reported making only infrequent visits to the school, 3. parents placed a high value on formal education for their children, but did little to assist their children with school work, 4. many parents did not see teachers as being very willing to help their children, and 5. students perceived a lack of overt encouragement from their teachers. The authors state, "this lack of encouragement that Mexican-

American parents and children perceive may discourage many children by the time they reach high school and adverseley affect the child's performance in school. This finding is of particular importance since the pilot study conducted in Las Cruces, New Mexico indicated that motivational factors were far more important in predicting success in mathematics than was the educational level of parents, or even the language that they speak."

Studies dealing with the relationship of cultural marginality to personality.

The first study to be reviewed is one by Derbyshire (1968). The Ss were Chicano adolescents living in a low income neighborhood in East Los Angeles. They were given a thirty-four page questionnaire which covered personal and family history as well as subjective feelings and attitudes toward persons and values significant in the life of the adolescent. The questionnaire included a series of concepts (i.e. father, mother, self, Mexican) to be rated on an Osgood Semantic Differential Scale. The results indicated that Chicanos who identified with the Mexican way of life to a greater extent were more educationally minded, more sympathetic and adaptable to deviants, maintain more respect for authority, and are more adaptable to conflicting situations. From these findings the author concludes, "the data indicate that the maintenance, perpetua-

tion, and integration of the Mexican heritage and culture is important to the maintenance of a stable sense of identity while growing up in the U.S." Ramirez (1969) also studied Chicano adolescents in California. He administered a Mexican-American values inventory to two hundred Chicano adolescents in Sacramento. The ten Ss who expressed the greatest degree of agreement with these values and the ten who expressed the least degree of agreement were administered the Bell Adjustment Inventory (Student Form). The findings obtained were as follows: 1. Ss who rejected Chicano values reported experiencing more conflicts with parents, more health problems, and more guilt and tension than those who had agreed with the values while 2. Chicano females who expressed agreement with the values scored higher on submissiveness and hostility than any of the other subgroups, and 3. males who expressed agreement with the values seemed to be best ajusted of all the sub-groups. This would seem to indicate that Chicano adolescents who rejected Chicano values experience more difficulty in adjustment than those who identify with them. Especially important appears to be the fact that Ss who rejected Chicano values reported experiencing more conflicts with their parents. This, along with the fact that they report feeling more guilt and tension and more health problems, seems to suggest that conflict with parents is resulting in tension which in turn is expressed

in the way of psychosomatic complaints. This would certainly be in line with observations made by Cleveland and Longakre (1967) with other people who are experiencing value conflicts.

The final study in this group is one by Jessor, Graves, Hanson, and Jessor (1968). The Ss were Spanish-American, Anglo-Americans, and Indian-Americans in a small town in southwestern Colorado. Adults and adolescents were included in the sample. Adults were interviewed and a variety of different instruments were used to assess the adolescents including self reports, group questionnaires, interviews, sociometrics, behavior tests, teacher ratings, and school records. The results showed that differences in values between the ethnic groups were relatively minor and that what emerged as crucially important were differences in expectation for achieving what was valued. With respect to social control and deviance proness, the data pointed to the critical role played by social controls especially with respect to Indians and Spanish-Americans. Both groups were subjected to strong pressures toward deviance yet the Spanish imbedded in a persisting structure of religious, family, and interpersonal sanctions contributed far less to the deviance rates than the Indians for whom the control structure was fragmented and weak. This implies that acculturation would tend to increase deviancy in Chicanos since the usual trend of accul-

turation is to reduce social controls of religion and family.

Studies attempting to relate cultural marginality to educational and personality variables.

There is one study (Ramirez, Taylor, and Petersen, 1970). which has attempted to deal with both educational and personality variables. The study consited of two experiments. The initial effort involved administering an attitudes towards education inventory to junior and senior high Mexican-American and Anglo students of the lower socio-economic class in Sacramento, California. The second part consisted of administering a projective technique, a story telling procedure, to three Chicano and three Anglo sub-groups from the original sample. The three groups within each ethnic group were selected according to their score on the attitude scale as follows: 1. those who had expressed positive attitudes toward education, those who had expressed negative attitudes and those whose scores were close to the mean. The results of the first part of the study showed that Chicanos expressed views toward education which were significantly less positive than those of Anglos. Items which differentiated significantly between the too ethnic groups appeared to reflect differences between the value orientations of the groups. Data obtained with the projective technique in the second phase of the study revealed that Chicanos had scored higher than Anglos on n Power, and

n Rejection but had scored lower on n Achievement. Again, the differences in motivational style were explained in terms of differences between value systems of the two ethnic groups. Furthermore, stories obtained with the projective technique seemed to indicate that Chicano students experienced more conflicts with both their parents and their teachers because they served as the carriers of values, introducing each to the value system of the other. Since neither parents nor teachers understood the culture of the other conflict with negative consequences for the Chicano student was the end result. The authors state "to improve the chances for academic success of the Mexican-American child changes must be made in both the educational system and in some of the attitudes perceptions and behaviors of the child .....by altering the structure of the educational system and by helping school personnel to become aware of the unique needs, perceptions, and attitudes of Chicano students most of the characteristics engendered by the Mexican-American culture in children can become an asset rather than a liability in the classroom".

Discussion

Education Studies

The studies reviewed emphasize the complexity of the acculturation issue. Schwartz (1969) found in his study of a Los Angeles sample of Chicanos that acculturation is

positively related to academic achievement, yet Cordova (1969), Henderson and Merritt (1968) and Anderson and Johnson (1968) find the opposite to be true in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas respectively. These findings first of all seem to indicate that the milieu plays a crucial role here. It is altogether possible for example that the schools from which Schwartz sampled in Los Angeles did not reinforce the child for his "Mexicaness." This is probably happening in El Paso, Texas as well, since both Chicano students and parents there consider the teachers as not being overly encouraging. The schools from which Cordova and Henderson and Merritt sampled in New Mexico and Arizona may follow a different policy. Here there may be more reinforcement or at least less punishment for being identified with the Mexican-American value system.

The research reviewed here also suggests that socio-economic variables are central to this issue. For example Schwartz found that white collar Chicano boys while being very compliant to family authority also achieved well in school. On the other hand Cordova found that in middle class students acculturation to family values was negatively related to performance in school. This suggests that the relationships between acculturation to family values and academic achievement may be linked to socio-economic class. Is it possible that acculturation is negatively related to achievement in the middle class but positively related

in the lower class? The fact that the middle class family may be more supportive of educational goals and values of the school makes this likely. In addition, teachers may be more supportive of cultural differences in middle class Chicano children than in lower class children. The results of the Ramirez, Taylor, and Petersen study, however, suggests that family support is also very crucial to performance of lower class children.

Personality studies.

Results of the personality studies are much more consistent than those in education. They reveal that acculturation in the form of reducing the Chicanos identity with his ethnic groups tends to result in negative consequences for psychological adjustment. The methodology of these studies, however, is not nearly as sophisticated as those reviewed in the education section. Almost all of these studies have employed paper and pencil instruments and have involved only superficial and short term study of Ss.

Recommendations

Almost every review of the literature ends in a call for additional research and this one is no exception. There is a great need for longitudinal studies in this area. Specifically there is need for extensive studies of how milieu, and

socio-economic class relate to effect of acculturation on personality and education. The Chicano is now socio-economically diverse and is found in so many different milieus that it will be necessary to do studies in rural and urban areas and in different states of the Southwest and Midwest. Who can deny that conditions for acculturation in Texas differ from those in California, or that those in East Los Angeles differ from those in San Antonio? Furthermore, there is need for studies on family dynamics. All studies reviewed showed that the family is closely tied to the effects which the Chicano child experiences in the process of becoming acculturated, yet we have no data available on Chicano family dynamics.

A research project like this could feed data into on-going compenstory education and mental health programs as it proceeds, thus, paying itself off as it unfolds. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. In the introduction to this paper I discussed the crucial issue which is at stake here - the end result of the struggle for cultural democracy in American public education will be so important to the future of Chicano children that we cannot afford to continue to proceed in darkness.

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